

Adventures of an External Internal Journey

by Lou Boden

In early June, on a Friday afternoon through a Monday afternoon, Frank Henninger and I led our first fluting adventure weekend at the North Mountain Outfitters Ranch, on 180 acres in the rolling hills of the Shenandoah Valley. Through our new little company called "Your Most Excellent Fluting Adventures," we created a meaningful adventure both externally and internally. We wanted it to be something that we would both love to attend. The Native American flute world is full of fantastic schools, festivals, and workshops, providing places all over the country to listen, learn, and share. We were after something more; something different.

This "something more" might be better understood if you knew Frank and me a little better. Frank, aside from playing and teaching the Native American flute, founded and facilitates the Firebird Native American Flute Circle in Phoenixville, Pennsylvania. He is an accomplished mountaineer and adventurer, with four climbs on Mount Rainier and several adventures into the Alaskan wilderness. One of these Alaskan adventures was a river float trip above the Arctic Circle, in Gates of the Arctic National Park. Frank is the author of *Compass Points: Finding a Mid-life Bearing on Mount Rainier*, a published poet, and he teaches workshops in spiritual journaling. Frank has also taken many "Science of Mind" courses at The Center for Spiritual Living in Paoli, Pennsylvania, including the practitioner-training course. Frank believes that playing the Native American flute is the channeling of the human breath into the sound of Spirit. He performs using the name "Ravenwolf," taken from two very unique totemic experiences he had on wilderness adventures.

In my previous life, I spent a few decades of teaching and training adults, as well as designing and implementing training programs. For my mid-life crisis, I went back to school, became a certified holistic healthcare practitioner and Reiki Master at The Washington School of Natural Medicine. I completed supervised clinical rounds at The Washington D.C. Home and Hospice. I also attended the four-year professional studies program at the Barbara Brennan School of Healing in Florida, and the two-year program at the New Seminary for Interfaith Studies in New York. I was ordained in 2007. It was some mid-life crisis! There were no flings, no sports car; rather, it was just years and years of school. Incidentally, I have 41 years and counting of marriage to an amazing self proclaimed "flute widow."

I have been in private practice since the late 1990s. I founded and facilitate the Spiritheart Flute and Drum Circle in Staunton, Virginia. I have taken our flutes and drums to The Woodrow Wilson Rehabilitation Center and worked with the residents there. I also founded "The Three Guys With Notes Outreach Project." This outreach project is now a joint plan of work with The Staunton Creative Community Fund, an incorporated non-profit designed to take this outreach model to as many places as we can find funding to reach. I also perform with our trio, "Three Guys With Notes," and we have released our first CD.

So, for Frank and me, as I am sure it is for many of you, the Native American flute is more than just another musical instrument. It is a connector to the earth, the sky, the Creator, and all that is. Every breath we share with the flute is joined with the people who listened to the message the Creator carried forth on the breeze and sounded through the trees. It is shared with the energy of the wood and the energy of the flute maker. When we stop and feel into the music that is created, something special happens.

This is what Frank and I want to help people consciously feel and experience. We want to share what we have experienced and what we continue to experience. And, from this place we created *experientials*, not classes or workshops. We decided that we would keep our "adventurer-to-guide" ratio at 8:1, so that any help that is needed to have this experience is readily available, sometimes even on a one-on-one basis. Keeping the group small allowed us to easily adjust the *experientials* as needed, based upon where everyone was at on their journey of unfolding. We wanted everyone to have his or her needs and desires met as much as possible.

We were very blessed to have the entire 180-acre ranch and bunkhouse to ourselves, with a terrific young couple feeding and looking after us. We began each day with a ceremony honoring the sun. Frank and I did the first one and the other two wonderful ceremonies were created and led by volunteers each day. We ended each day at a big campfire with storytelling, open microphone opportunities, and a lot of laughter and warmth. In between, we shared in *experientials*, as well as a grounding and connection to the earth.

"Spoken Word and the Native American Flute" was an *experiential* that Frank led during our weekend, an experience that I personally will carry with me for a long time. We asked everyone to bring a prayer or a poem that they would love to share with flute accompaniment. What happened was that some brought their personal poetry and written-word compositions. The depth of this personal sharing brought forth emotions in all of us. For me, it meant that Frank and I had somehow created a safe container in which people could openly and safely share.

We experienced the music internally through every note, every idea, every improvisation, and every small group happening. There was an *experiential* nature walk during which flutes were played with the birds, the flowers, the trees, the mountains, the land, and, of course, the views. Since we were a small group, I was able to stay back and help others with their needs, or just be around for those who simply wanted some alone-time. We set a schedule so that anyone who wanted alone-time could skip, leave, or rejoin an *experiential* as it felt right for him or her. The overall energy was amazing.

Jan Seiden, a well-known Native American flute performer, recovering from a serious accident, was one of our adventurers. She wanted to just be among the fluting community without having to be "on stage." She is an amazing person and it was a joy to have her with us.

Brad Young, another Native American flute performer and flute maker, brought several flutes to sell. He also participated for part of the adventure and played flute at two of our open microphone campfires.

Mike Deaton, an amazing world percussionist, workshop leader, and teacher, joined us. He is also a part of my trio and outreach project. He did a drumming *experiential* and added wonderfully to our evening jams in a fun and infectious way.

At the end, we asked everyone to give us written feedback. Below are a few samples of their comments:

"I felt it was freeing, enjoyable, and wonderful ... an excellent opportunity to feel good about playing with other people and interact with them without fear or trepidation about honestly showing myself." (Peter)

"It was a magical adventure blending music in a scenic and inspiring setting. Thanks for our most wonderful fluting adventure." (Kathy)

"I feel it went way beyond what I could have ever expected. Emotions were overflowing from my being." (Kathleen)

We already have a waiting list for our next adventure, and we are working on confirming the dates. If I had dreamed my very best dream about how this would all look and feel, it could not possibly have been better than the reality that happened. Frank and I give thanks to all of our teachers, trainers, mentors, and those who have come before us and brought us to this place. We thank all the adventurers who joined us, for their willingness to participate in going deeper. We also give thanks to those who will teach us in the future, as they appear when the time is right. It is all good and we are truly blessed.



Frank Henninger



Lou Boden



Bunkhouse View